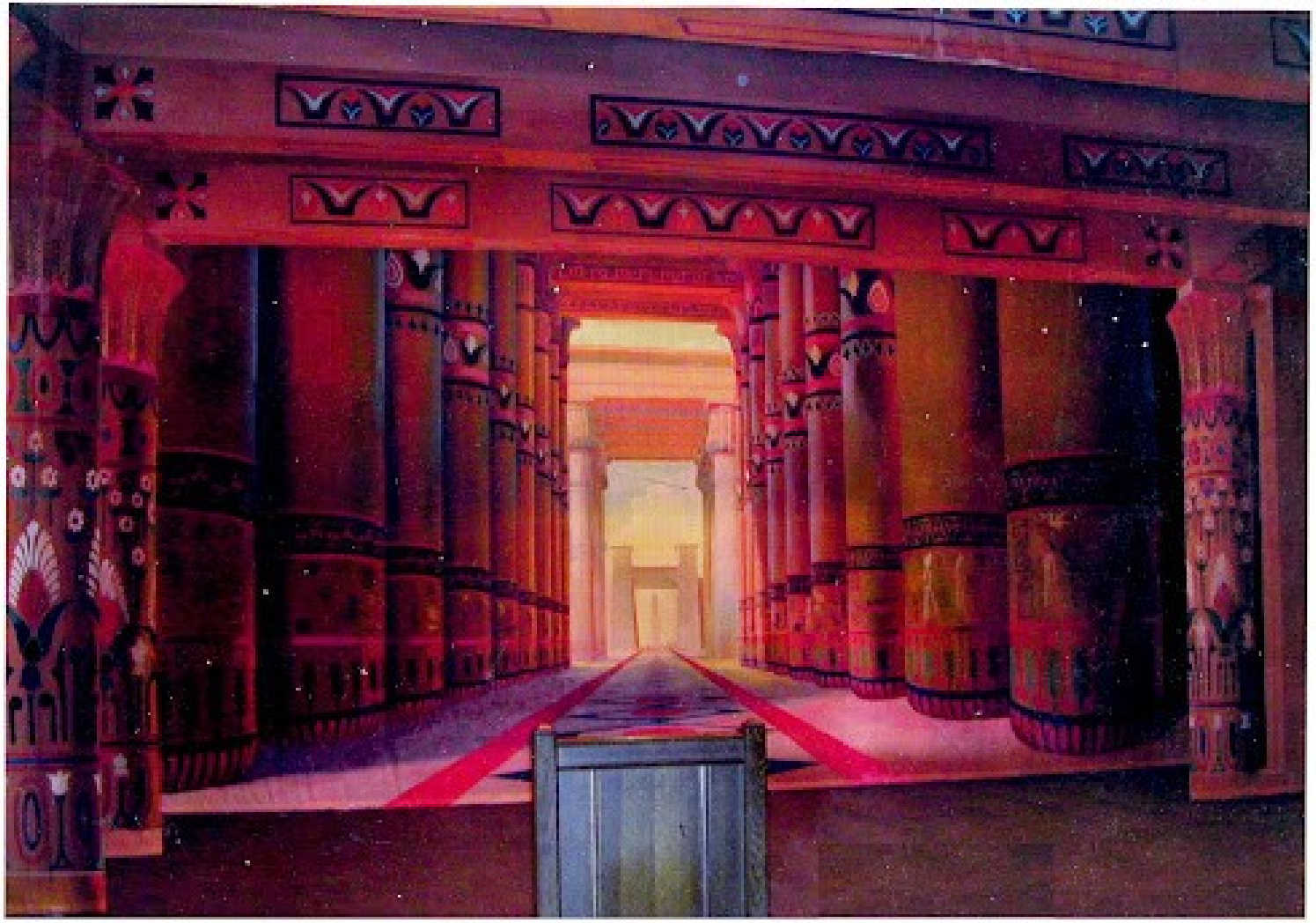
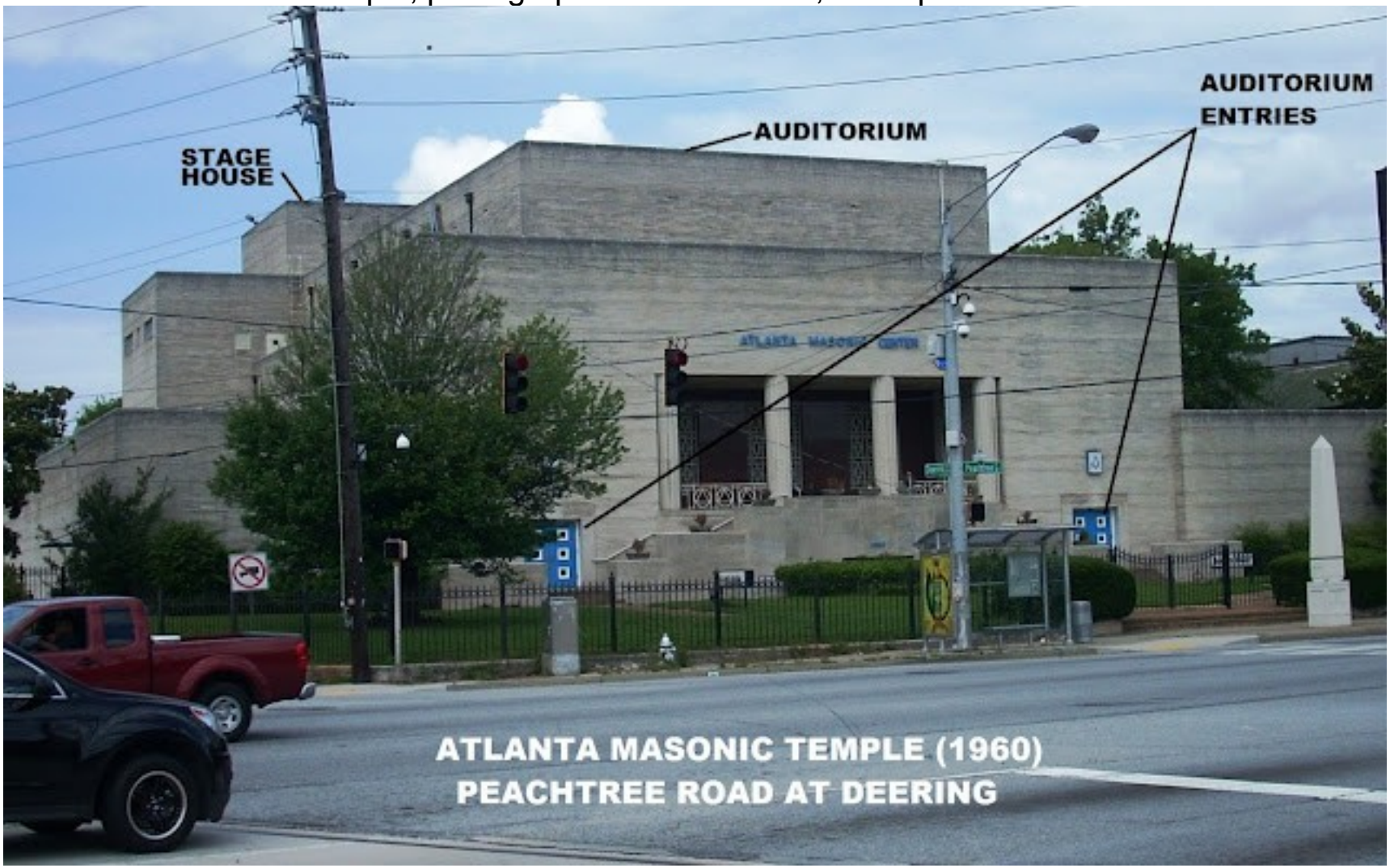
THEATRE MAGIC AT THE ATLANTA MASONIC TEMPLE 1960



The Atlanta Masonic Temple, photographed here in 2015, was opened in 1960.



This Temple replaced the one located downtown, shown here on the near right, north of the Henry Grady Hotel (and Roxy Theatre) and Davison's, still standing. On the left can be seen the original First Baptist Church.

The downtown temple appears to contain a stage house at roof level, and this is where the fire began, when it burned to the ground in 1950.

In its prime:

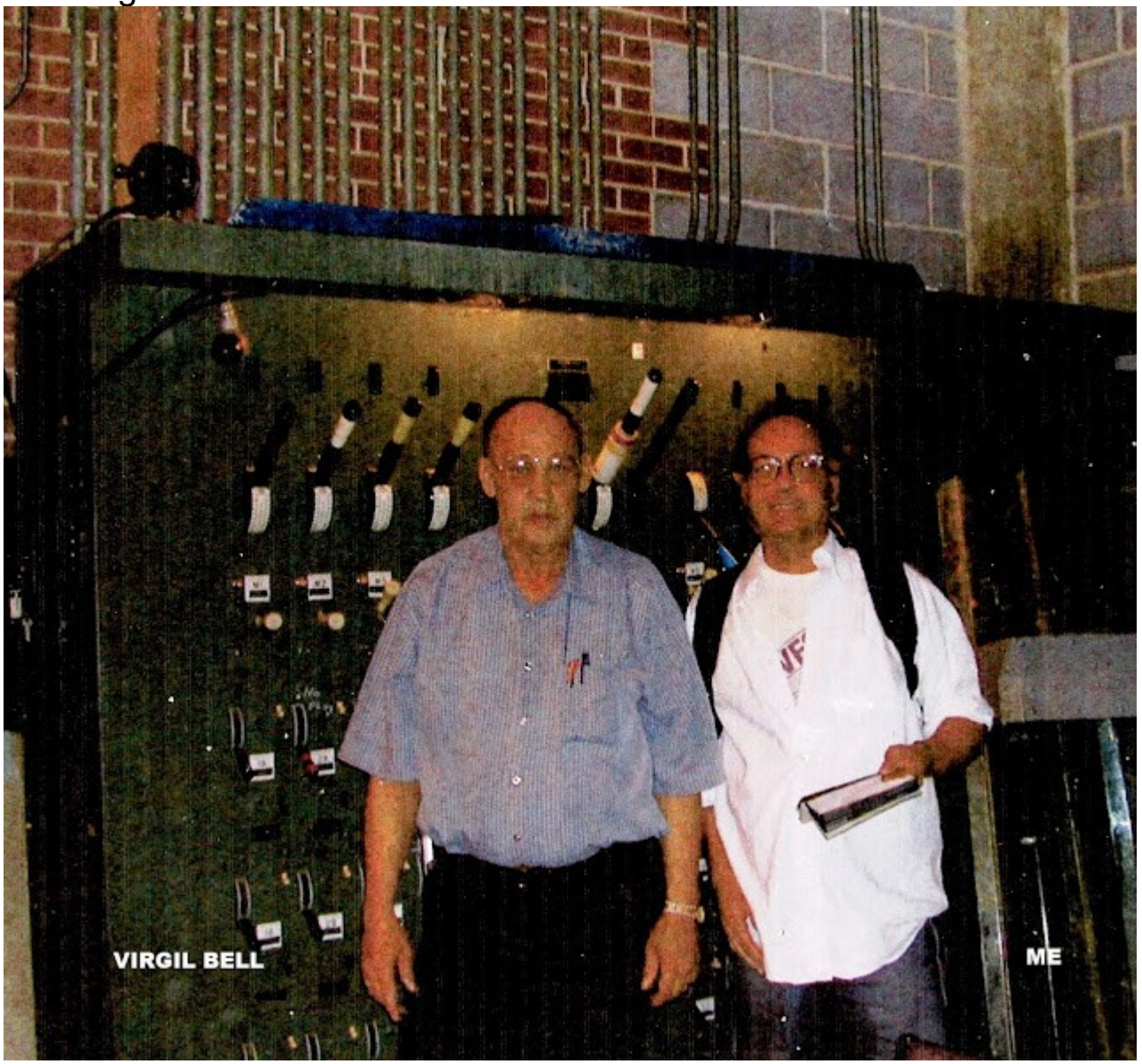
When I was a kid, my Dad read in the paper that the new Temple was having a rare open house, and knowing my interest in theatre, he took me there. It was the first theatre I had ever seen with a fly house. It was also the first (and only) theatre I have ever seen with permanent scenery.

In 2003, I made arrangements to see the theatre again, and my Dad came along with his digital camera. I learned that the house was unchanged from forty years previous, because the Masons had allowed no one but themselves to use the place. There was a scenery door, but it had never been utilized.

This is how the auditorium appeared in a 1961 Atlanta Magazine photo. A thrust stage for ceremonial purposes extends from the stage proper.

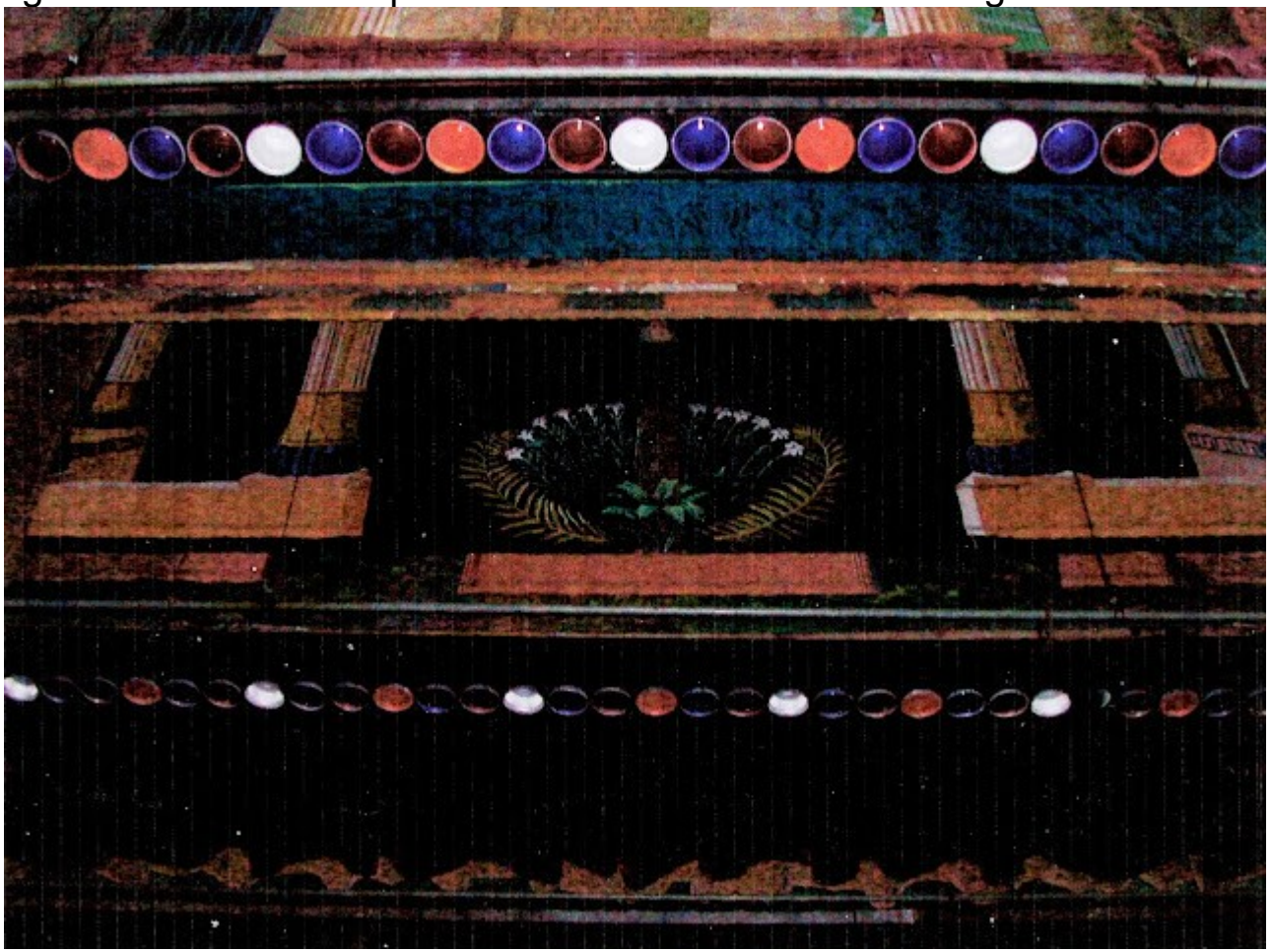
Looking towards the back of the house.

Our guide was a ranking Mason named Virgil Bell, now deceased, was in charge of the stage. I am standing to his right.



The house is equipped with a Hub autotransformer board with proportional masters (top row) and a patch panel, not shown here.

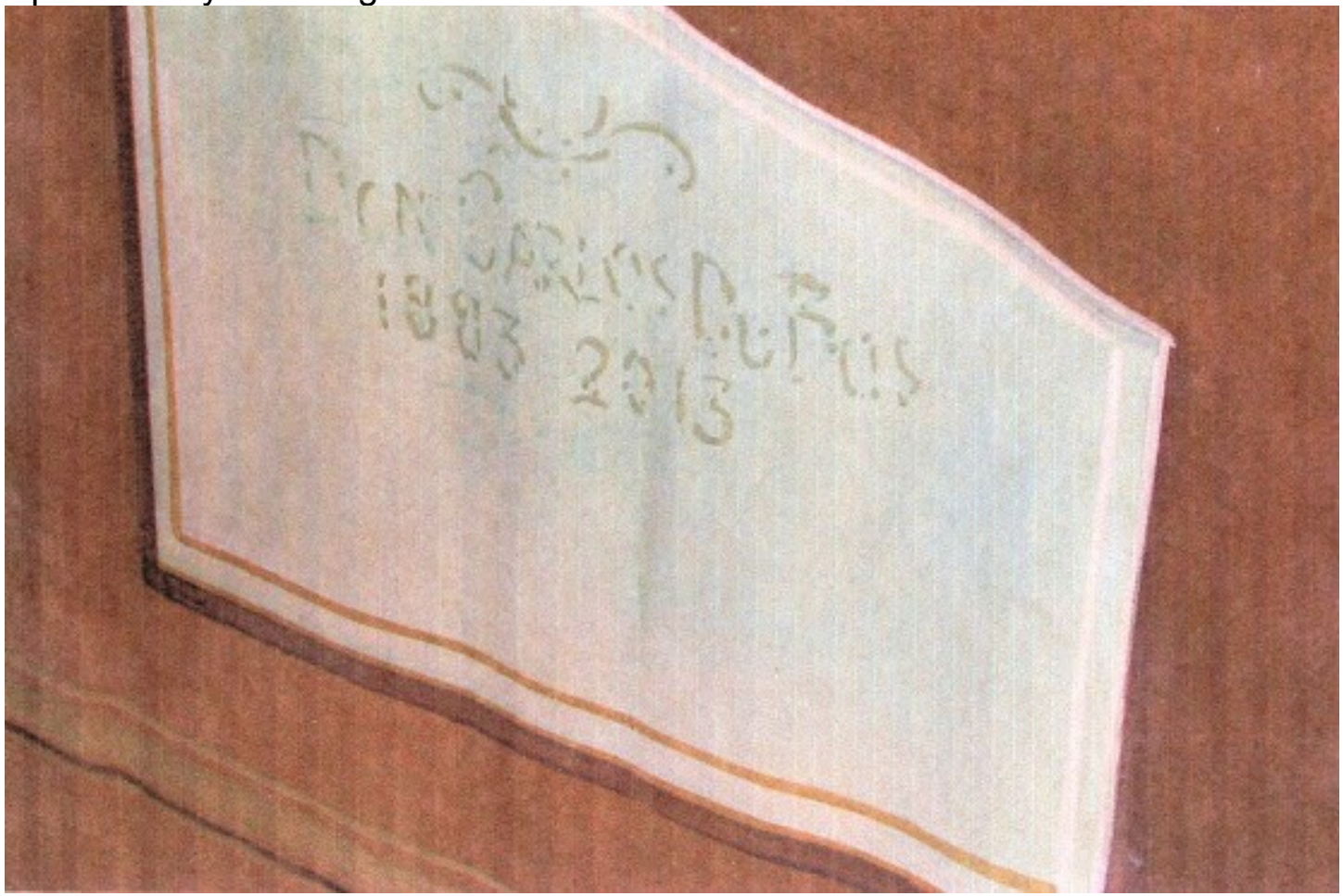
The flies held 83 pieces of permanent scenery and five rows of four-color borderlights. There was some front light and several floor pockets for effects machines dating from the 1920's which I later helped him to repair.



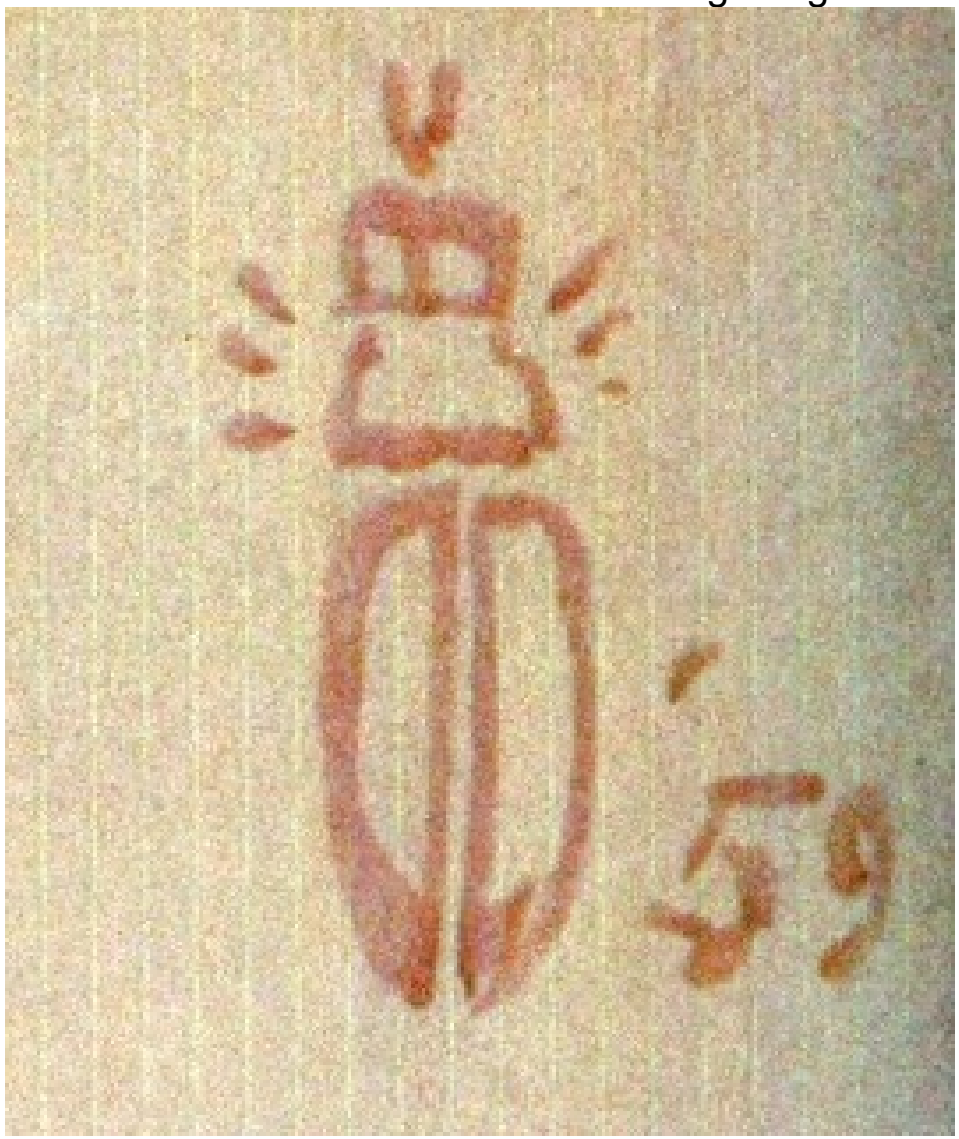
The linesets were on 4 inch centers (6 inches is the standard) controlled by a wire-guide counterweight fly system.

Here is a the Mausoleum about a foot upstage of the curtain line.

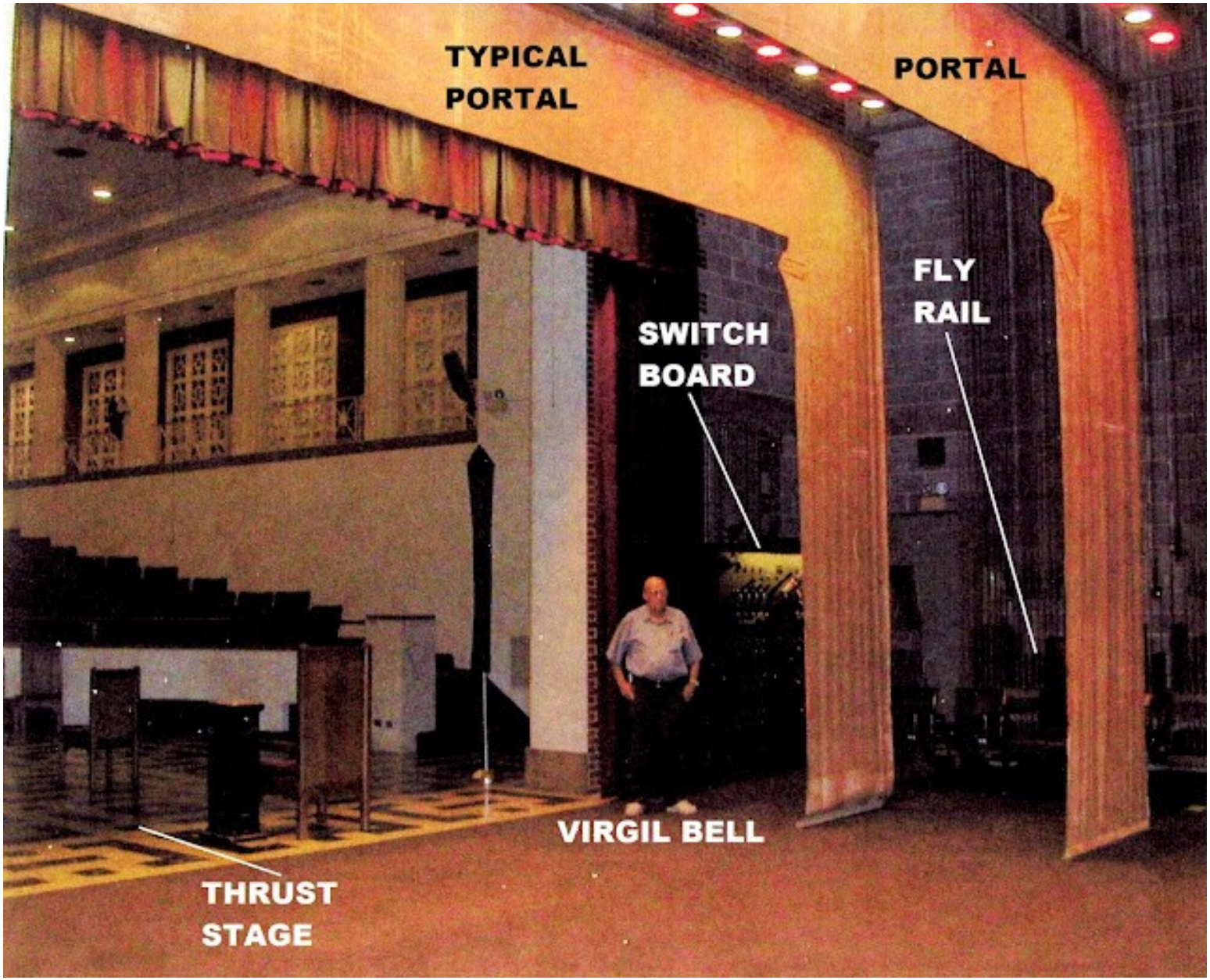
Virgil Bell told us that the scenery and rigging were supplied by the Great Western Stage Equipment Company of Kansas City that specialized in Masonic Halls. The scenic artist was named Don Carlos DuBois who signed some of the drops until his bosses told him not to. On the drop above, he put his name on a grave marker, optimistically choosing 2013 for his death date. He died in 1964.



Here his initials are contained within the sacred scarab on the offstage edge of a drop.

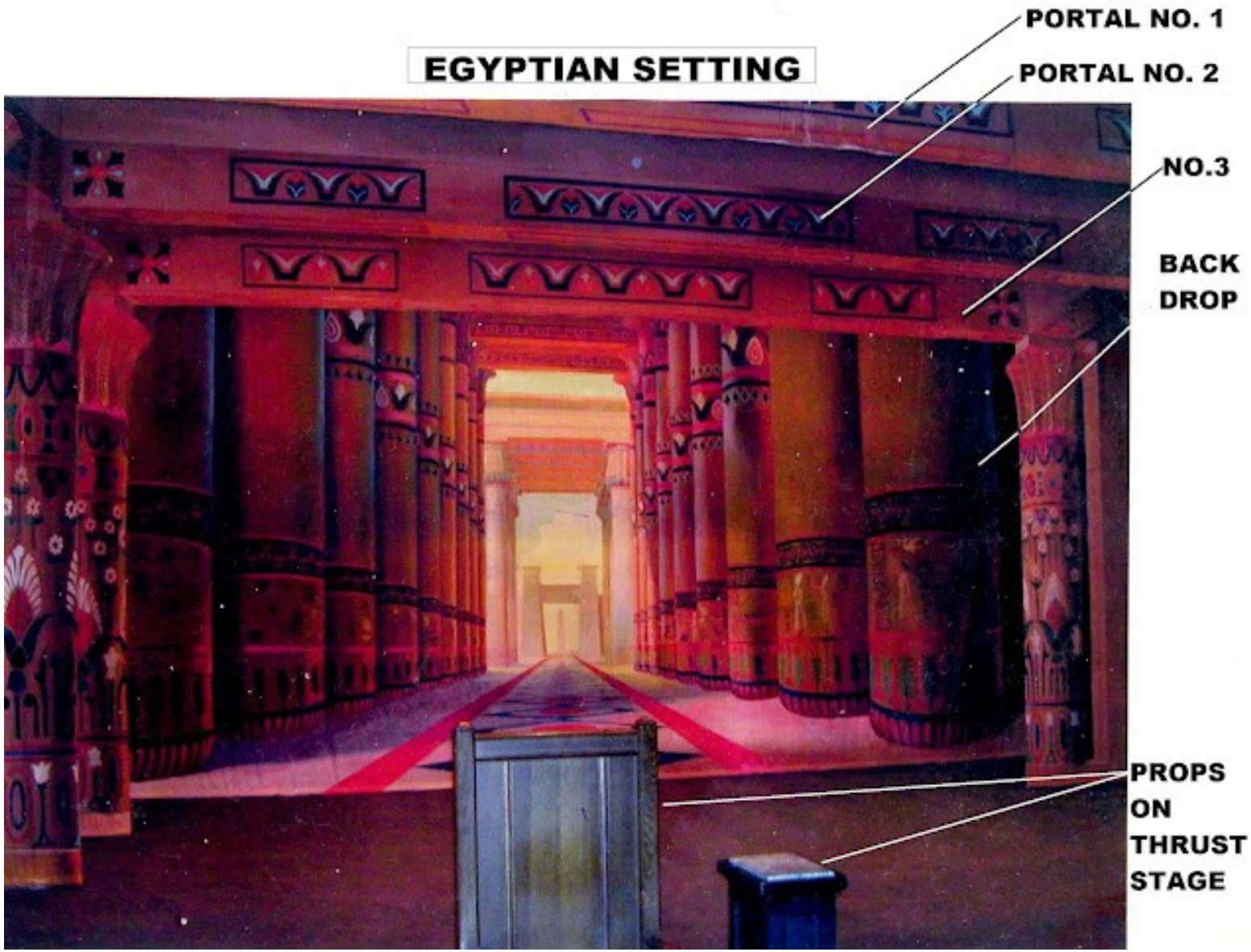


Seventy-two of the 83 sets were allotted for "scenes," which were comprised of three portals, or cut drops, and a back drop. The remainder of the lines were for drapes, lights, and stand alone in-one drops such as Mausoleum.



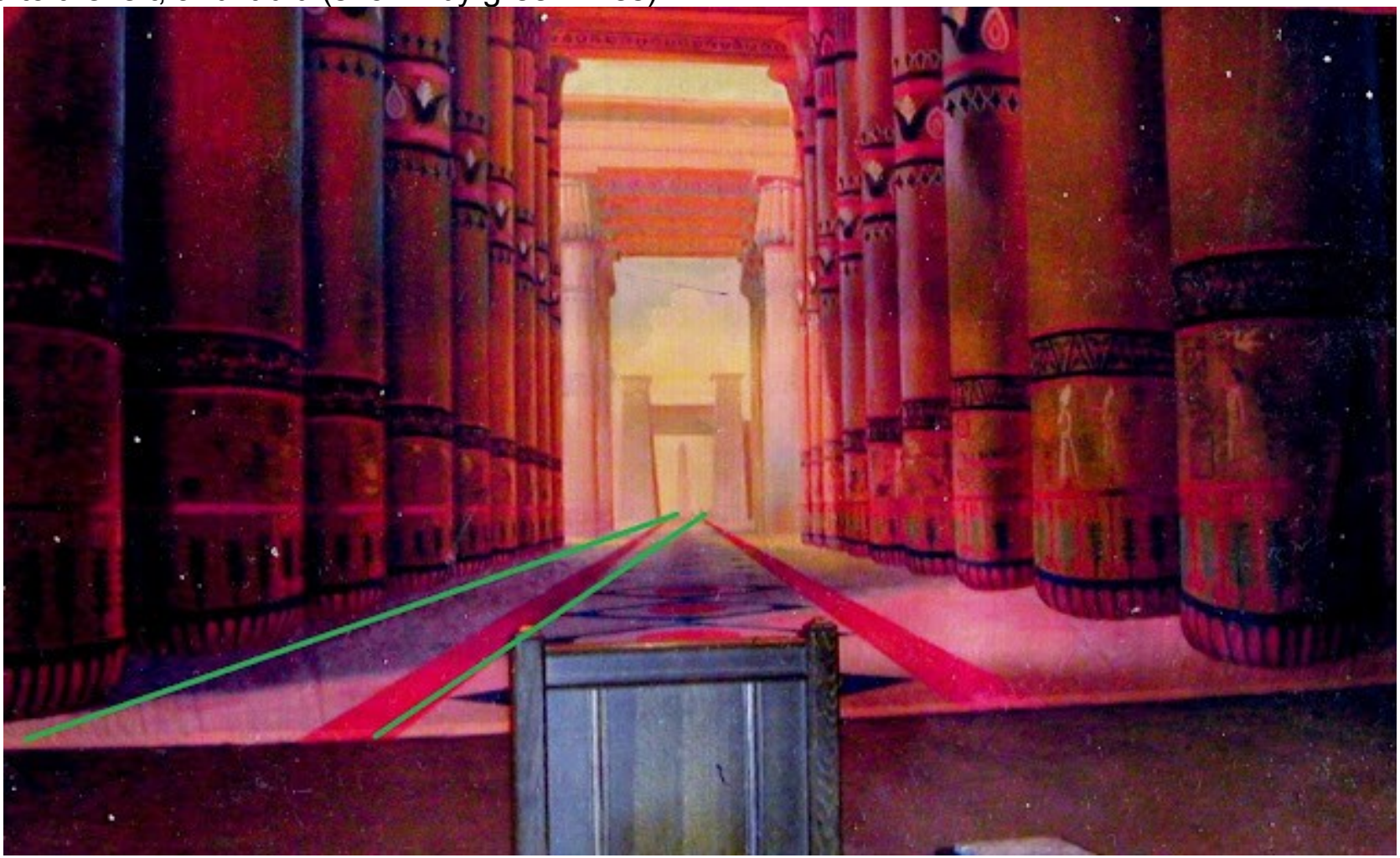
Virgil showed us the little notebook that listed the numbers of the four linesets which corresponded to each scene.

My Dad and I, thinking of the Fox Theatre down the street, selected the scene shown above, the Egyptian Temple, and Virgil brought it in.



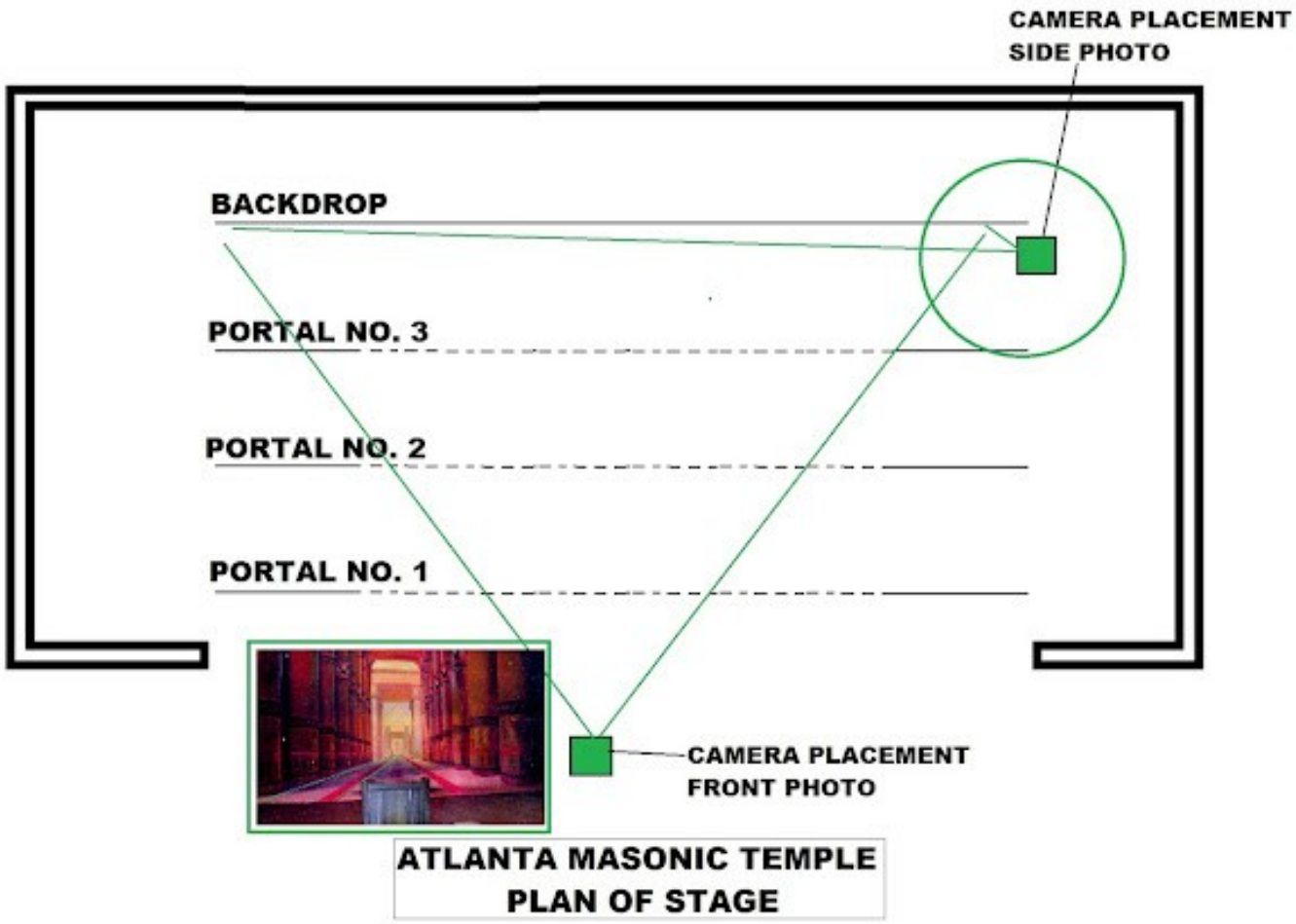
At this point Virgil told us to concentrate on the back drop. "You see that pathway in the center? It will follow you."

I walked to the left, and it did (shown by green lines).

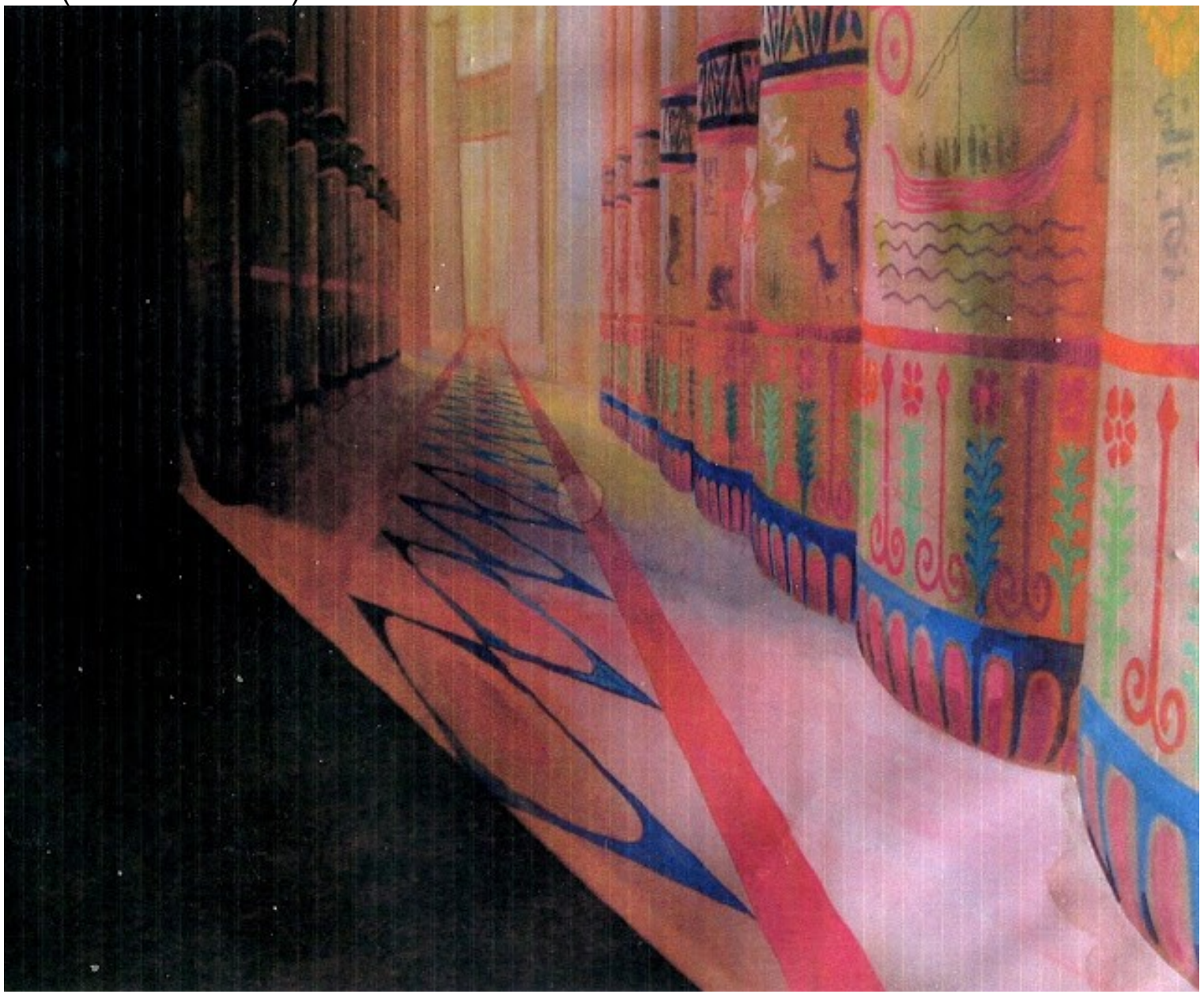


I walked to the right, ditto. Now this is a piece of painted canvas.

Being a skeptic, I asked my Dad to move his camera to the extreme offstage edge of the drop, the new position shown circled. If the pathway could "follow me," this would be proof.



This is what we (and the camera) saw:



Here are the two shots together. As a reference point, the columns on the right of each shot are the same column.

A few days later after I had seen my Dad's photographs, I went to the library and consulted every book I could locate concerning optical illusion, forced perspective and trompe l'oeil. There was nothing in any book remotely similar to what the Masons had accomplished. I had to invent a term to describe it: continuously variable perspective, which is of course is not possible. Yet there is was.

Here is Don Carlos' rendering of the Egyptian Temple drop.

31' Egyptian Temple

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SCENIC COLLECTIONS DATABASE

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Great Western Stage Equipment Company Collectic

Acquisition: 1988. Purchased from Dale F. Jenkins through the combined efforts of the University of Minnesota Theatre Arts Department, the University Libraries and outside donors.

Access: Open for research. The University of Minnesota Libraries - Manuscripts Division, contained in the Performing Arts Archives. They are located on the second floor of Elmer L. Anderson Library, 222 - 21st Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455. To contact an archivist, please email mssref@tc.umn.edu or telephone 612-625-3550.

Processed by: University of Minnesota Undergraduate Research Opportunities Grant recipient, Wendy Rae Waszut 1989-1990.

Historical Background:

The Great Western Stage Equipment Company Collection focuses on a second generation of stage design for the Scottish Rite Temple of Freemasonry during the mid-twentieth century. Established in 1925, the Great Western Stage Equipment Company, was located in Kansas City, MO. This company represents a second generation of scenic studios that produced scenery for the Scottish Rite Temple of Freemasonry. The Great Western Stage Equipment Company (Kansas City), Twin City Scenic Studio (Minneapolis/St. Paul) and Tiffin Studio (Ohio) followed a pattern

established by earlier prominent studios such as Sosman and Landis (Chicago), Toomey (St. Louis), and Volland Studios (St. Louis). The Great Western Stage Equipment Company collection revisits the original Masonic subject matter depicted in the Holak collection and applies a mid-Twentieth century interpretation. These "new" versions replaced existing scenery from original installations at Masonic buildings-such as that originally created for the Masonic Temple in Atlanta.

The company was founded by T. L. Greening, L. J. Adler, and Samuel F. Hann, after Greening resigned from the Twin City Scenic Company as a salesman. Greening functioned as the manager and treasurer, while both Adler and Hann held the positions of President and vice-president respectively. As the volume of business grew, George G. Wing was hired as an assistant manager, for the Dramatic field. Throughout early company brochure, Mrs. S .F. Hann was also recognized as a company executive who exclusively controlled the drapery department. Company clientel included: the Scottish Rite Temple in Galveston, Texas; the Grand Theatre in Fort Stockton, Texas; the Lyric Theatre in Tulsa, Oklahoma; the Coleman Theatre in Miami, Oklahoma; the Oklahoman Theatre in Hobat, Oklahoma; and Hardin College in Mexico, Missouri.Greater Kansas City institutions included the Arafat Shrine, Granada Theatre, Madrid Theatre, Pantages Theatre, Rockhill Theatre, Neptune Theatre, Linwood Theatre, Oak Park Theatre, Tivoli Theatre, Murray Theatre, Baltis Theatre, and Isis Theatre,

Scope and contents:

The entirety of this collection reflects the drawing and rendering techniques of two mid-twentieth century artists, George F. Moody and Don Carlos DuBois. Their design process is traced from rough draft through final installation in four fraternal theatre installations including: the Scottish Rite Temple in Kansas City, Kansas (1952); the Scottish Rite Temple in Kansas City, Missouri (1958); the Scottish Rite Temple in Atlanta, Georgia (1960); and the Scottish Rite Temple in Columbus, Georgia (1962).

The theatrical design process is

represented through rough drafts, refined pencil sketches, colored renderings, technical drawings, and completed installation photographs. In addition to this primary visual material, there are written records documenting the ultimate creation, installation and production of these designs. The personal and business records of DuBois thoroughly examine initial labor estimates, contracts, and labor invoices, pertaining to the above-mentioned theatre installations. Other materials from this collection include an address book of Masonic contacts, fraternal supply catalogues, Great Western Stage Equipment Company sales catalogues, and Masonic playbills. There are also over 300 photo stats, 39 photographs, and 24 photographic negatives that further document additional scenic designs and their theatrical installation.

The majority of the materials represent the scenic designs for the Scottish Rite Temple of Freemasonry. However, there are technical drawings and some initial staging concepts for the Mystic Order of Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm (M.O.V.P.E.R.) Grotto, an allied organization of Freemasonry. Floorplans, installation instruction, and sketches document the first ceremonial and subsequent ceremonial sessions at the Lyric Theatre in Memphis,Tennessee.

Box 1 -27 pieces, colored renderings.

Box 2 -29 pieces, colored renderings. 3 are still framed and not contained in this box.

Box 3 -25 pieces, colored renderings.

Box 4 -18 pieces, colored renderings.

Box 5 -Oversize box. 8 pieces, sketches and colored renderings.

Supp. Box 5 -Rough drafts, pencil sketches, technical drawings, and photo stats.

Supp. Box 6 -Color photos of renderings and original scenic installations.

Supp. Box 7 -Personal records of Don Carlos DuBois regarding scenic painting and time estimates.

Supp. Box 8 -Catalogues and play bills.

Supp. Box 9 -Company letters and job descriptions of scenic installations.

Supp. Box 10 -Photo stats of original pencil sketches contained in Supplemental Box 5.

Supp. Box 11 -Photo stats of original pencil sketches contained in Supplemental Box 5.

Supp. Box 12 -Negative photo stats (white on black versions of original pencil sketches).

Arrangement of the collection:

The colored renderings and large pencil sketches are arranged in the archives by Masonic degree. This ordering goes from the 4° through the 32° of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. The colored renderings and large pencil sketches are located in boxes 1-5. Box 5 being an oversize box, it's arrangement still follows categorization by numerical degree. Supplemental boxes 5-12 contain rough drafts, pencil and all other company materials that were included in the collection. All rough drafts and pencil sketches are arranged according to numerical degree. Photo stats and negative photo stats reflecting the original pencil sketches, contents of supplemental box 5, are stored in subsequent supplemental boxes 10 and 11. Photo stats that depict subject matter no included in the original pencil sketches are also stored in box 5.

Location of the collection: Performing Arts Archives located in suite #213 of the Elmer L. Anderson Library. University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus, West Bank.

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